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Metaphor and Philosophy: an Encounter with Derrida

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Here is a caricature of how things might stand between Literature and Philosophy departments who did not get on well with each other. The Philosophers think that the members of the Literature department dabble in philosophy, but without taking it seriously: without pursuing the consequences of their commitments, or being properly concerned to ensure that their views are even consistent. The members of the Literature department, on the other hand, find the seriousness of the Philosophers almost comic: the Philosophers seem to be unaware of the susceptibility of their own work to a literary analysis which inevitably deflates its pretensions. In such a dispute, the name of Derrida might well be mentioned: by the Philosophers, as the epitome of literary-theoretical flippancy about serious issues; and by the more theoretically-minded members of the Literature department, as someone who has exposed the muddles and contradictions within the whole enterprise of philosophy.

Derrida's famous paper, 'White Mythology',[1] challenges each such department's conception of the other, and also presents a philosophical problem. Derrida claims that an attempt to debunk philosophy in general, on the grounds that philosophy is no more than a collection of worn-out metaphors (a 'white [or anaemic] mythology'), must fail, because the concept of metaphor presupposes the very philosophy which is under attack. Conversely, philosophy itself presupposes the concept of metaphor, but—and here is the problem for philosophy—it cannot really accommodate the concept of metaphor. This problem is not, of course, just a problem for philosophy: it is a problem for anyone who uses the concept of metaphor, if the concept of metaphor really does presuppose philosophy.

I shall try, in a cautious and serious philosophical way, to make out a case for Derrida's challenge, and suggest a way of responding to it.

[1] J. Derrida, 'White Mythology', in his *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 207–71.

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I

I shall concentrate on three claims which can be found in Derrida's paper:

(D1) The concept of metaphor presupposes philosophy;
(D2) Philosophy presupposes (the legitimacy of) the concept of metaphor;
(D3) Philosophy cannot accommodate the concept of metaphor.

Here is the evidence that Derrida himself is making these claims. (D1) and (D2) can be seen as two sides of the central claim of 'White Mythology':

> [M]etaphor remains, in all its essential characteristics, a classical philosopheme.[2]

If we take '-pheme' to be a way of avoiding the word 'concept' (in part because the word 'concept' might itself be thought to presuppose the philosophical enterprise), and then use the word 'concept' to put the point more simply, this says that the concept of metaphor is a philosophical concept; which, I take it, implies at least (D1) but also probably (D2).

Thesis (D1) is drawn out explicitly in a remark which asserts the impossibility of commenting on the use of metaphor in philosophy from a position which is philosophically neutral:

> [I]t is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphorics as such, *from the exterior*, by using a concept of metaphor which remains a philosophical product.[3]

Derrida's commitment to (D2) is made clear when he describes a certain claim as

> an already philosophical *thesis*, one might even say philosophy's *unique thesis*, the thesis which constitutes the concept of metaphor, the opposition of the proper and the nonproper ...[4]

(I will return in a moment to the claim which is here described.)

Thesis (D3) can be seen as arising from two claims. Derrida says:

> [P]hilosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. Its instruments belonging to its field, philosophy is incapable of dominating its general tropology and metaphorics.[5]

[2] Ibid., 219.
[3] Ibid., 228.
[4] Ibid., 229.
[5] Ibid., 228.

That is, philosophy cannot 'dominate' the concept of metaphor. But philosophy is also held to be somehow committed to the ideal of 'domination'; for example, Derrida says, the concept of concept (itself held to be both central to philosophy and irreducibly metaphorical) 'cannot not retain the gesture of mastery'.[6]

Many philosophers will be unhappy about this: it will seem to them to be a vague and metaphorical characterization of the commitments of philosophy. But this unhappiness only provides the entry for a second argument (which might be thought to be an alternative formulation of the first). The second argument has it that philosophy is committed to thinking that every genuine concept, and every genuine distinction, is non-metaphorical. This, I think, is what Derrida calls 'philosophy's *unique thesis*'; he puts it as follows:

> [T]he sense aimed at through these figures is an essence rigorously independent of that which transports it.[7]

That is to say that the metaphors considered here—though the point presumably applies to all metaphors—are in principle dispensable: the same concepts and distinctions could be expressed non-metaphorically. But Derrida also claims that the concept of metaphor is itself irreducibly metaphorical.[8] We can lay these two claims out, as follows:

(D3a) Philosophy is committed to thinking that every genuine concept or distinction can be expressed non-metaphorically;
(D3b) The concept of metaphor, and the distinctions on which it depends, cannot be expressed non-metaphorically.

It is important to be cautious about what is being claimed about philosophy in (D3a). Philosophy does not, according to this, have to object to the use of metaphors in general; nor does it have to avoid using metaphors itself, as a stylistic device. And it need not think that metaphors are dispensable in any particular text. Obviously, if metaphors were thought to be indispensable, some account would then have to be given of what metaphors do which does not involve the idea of essentially metaphorical concepts and distinctions; but it might seem that there was some room for manoeuvre here.

Nevertheless, the three (or four) theses which I have attributed to Derrida make large presumptions about the nature of philosophy and of metaphor, which need to be exposed and subjected to critical scrutiny.

[6] Ibid., 224.
[7] Ibid., 229.
[8] Ibid., 220, for example.

II

Derrida supports (D1), (D2) and (D3a) by analysis of particular texts. Those who have purported to analyse metaphors in philosophical texts from some neutral, non-philosophical (or at least metaphilosophical), perspective are found in fact to have presupposed a certain traditional kind of philosophical theory. Philosophers are found to have used metaphors at certain fundamental points in their systems, and to have defined their goals by implicit contrast with metaphorical description. Moreover, they have repeatedly shown themselves to be committed to the view that concepts and distinctions are, in general, independent of any particular mode of expression; and the insistence that no genuine concept or distinction needs to be expressed by means of a metaphor belongs with that in the texts Derrida analyses.[9]

He also offers the same kind of empirical support for (D3b), showing the recurrence of metaphors in the characterization of metaphor in the history of philosophy.[10] And he goes further in this case, attempting to characterize metaphor himself, and finding himself (unsurprisingly) constantly using metaphors in the characterization.[11]

Derrida inevitably has to be selective in his analysis of texts; but there is no immediate reason to think that the selection is badly biassed. Many of the philosophers considered seem to have been caught off their guard in the passages Derrida considers, but the kind of incautiousness they display is itself prevalent in discussions of these themes. And it is easy enough to find other texts in the history of philosophy which have a similar tendency, and hard to think of any which would suggest a radically different view. And although some of his analyses may be tendentious on some points, they seem broadly fair in their discovery of views which support (D1)–(D3). It is hard to read Derrida's analyses without a sense that it is inevitable that he will find what in fact he does find. Moreover, I suspect that most honest philosophers will recognize what Derrida finds in the history of philosophy as at least close to something they hold themselves, although they may feel that they are not really committed to it, that they could change their minds on this without affecting much of the rest of their philosophy.

[9] The link between metaphor and the general distinction between signifier and signified is brought out at 'White Mythology', pp. 227–8.

[10] In particular in the section of 'White Mythology' entitled 'The Ellipsis of the Sun'.

[11] Derrida does this in the opening pages of his 'The *Retrait* of Metaphor', trans. F. Gasdner, B. Iginla, R. Madden and W. Best, *Enclitic* 2 (1978), pp. 5–33.

Nevertheless, the evidence of the history of philosophy, and of most philosophers' sneaking consciousness of their own inclinations, does not really constitute an argument for (D1)–(D3).[12] For it could be just that there has been a whole tradition of mistaken theory about metaphor; and the inevitability with which philosophers seem to commit themselves to this theory might be no more than a kind of psychological inevitability, which would explain the perennial temptation of the theory. The problem, in short, is that (D1)–(D3) are philosophical claims, and no amount of empirical evidence can justify a philosophical claim.

What is needed is some conception of what is necessary to and distinctive of philosophy as such. A hint of where to look is provided by Derrida's account of (some of the history of) the concept of the 'proper'. On the one hand, the 'proper' stands to the 'non-proper' as the literal stands to the non-literal: these concepts and this distinction are presupposed by the concept of metaphor. And on the other hand, according to Derrida, the notion of the 'proper' picks out a central philosophical value. Crucially, the 'proper' is associated with univocity: that is, unity and coherence of meaning. And Derrida claims:

> Univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language. No philosophy, as such, has ever renounced this Aristotelian ideal. This ideal is philosophy.[13]

This ideal is linked in Aristotle, in a way which Derrida takes to be fundamental to philosophy, with the principle of non-contradiction.[14]

These hints can be developed to provide fairly explicit characterizations of philosophy and of metaphor. These characterizations will not be uncontroversial, of course, but I think they are at least plausible.

III

A connection between metaphor and philosophy is suggested by two rather different texts; and this can then be used to provide a char-

[12] G. Bennington appears to deny this in G. Bennington and J. Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. G. Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 129: but this denial does not follow from the premise which is offered for it, that the words and concepts involved are not arbitrary, but have a history.

[13] 'White Mythology', p. 247.

[14] Ibid., 248. The reference to Aristotle is to *Metaphysics*, 1005b35ff.

acterization of the nature of philosophy. At the beginning of his 'Letter on Humanism', Heidegger says, 'Language is the house of Being'. The *surprising* claim comes towards the end of this paper; Heidegger says:

> The talk about the house of Being is no transfer of the image 'house' to Being. But one day we will, by thinking the essence of Being in a way appropriate to its matter, more readily be able to think what 'house' and 'to dwell' are.[15]

I take it that this means that 'Language is the house of Being' is not a metaphor; it is only taken to be a metaphor by someone who does not really understand the concepts of *house* and *dwelling*. Similarly, Wittgenstein appears to claim, in the *Tractatus*, that propositions are literally pictures.[16] This may not be our normal view, but it can be justified by a philosophical account of pictures.

What is suggested here is that it is the business of philosophy to provide or reach an understanding of the nature or essence of things, to understand what it is to be X, whatever X may be. And when we talk of 'what it is to be X', we always mean what it is to be *literally* (that is, non-metaphorically) X.

We can link this simple thought to univocity of meaning as follows. In order to make sense of the possibility of truth and falsity in the use of a particular word or concept, we must see all the uses of that word or concept as being answerable to a certain common standard; unless we can make sense of the same standard applying to both the true and the false cases, we cannot distinguish between a false use of the same word or concept and a true use of a different one. There are various ways of thinking of this common standard, but the most non-committal takes it to be the unifying point or rationale of the legitimate uses of a given word or concept. The idea is that any particular use of a word or concept must be answerable to comparisons with other uses of the same word or concept; and to be recognized as legitimate it must be seen to be subject to the rationale which unifies those other uses. This unifying point is, in effect, the meaning of the word or the core of the concept: it is that in virtue of which the legitimate uses are legitimate; and, together with the actual state of the world, it is that in virtue of which true uses are true and false uses are false. The connection with the simple account of (a crucial part of) the business of philosophy which

[15] M. Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, D. Krell (ed.), (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), pp. 236–7.

[16] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922), §4011.

I have extracted from Heidegger and Wittgenstein is this: to understand what it is to be X, whatever X may be, is to understand the unifying point or rationale of the legitimate uses of the word for or concept of X.

Naturally, a contrast must be presumed with the merely illegitimate uses of the word or concept. What is more interesting about the claims made by Heidegger and Wittgenstein is that a contrast is presumed with the metaphorical. But there is a natural justification for that further presumption: it is that, although things which are metaphorically X do in some way fall within the rationale for the word for or concept of X, there is nevertheless a sense in which they do not. Consequently, given the actual state of the world, something which is only metaphorically X will seem to be in a way X, and in a way not X. There is evidently a threat that including the metaphorical uses with the uses for which a unifying rationale has to be found would lead one at worst into contradiction, and at best into simple indeterminacy. So it is natural to insist that the legitimate uses of a word or concept must be contrasted with the metaphorical uses, as well as with the simply illegitimate uses.

This general conception of philosophy seems to me close in spirit to what Derrida has in mind, independently attractive to philosophers themselves, and very modest. It is modest because its validity seems to be presupposed by the very idea of truth and falsehood. Someone might deny this, on the grounds that 'family resemblance' concepts provide an example of concepts for which there is a difference between truth and falsehood, without there being any unifying rationale. But 'family resemblance' concepts do have a unifying point or rationale; it is just not one which can be captured in a simple formula which is usefully applicable to every case. The unity is evident in the metaphor of 'family resemblance' itself: the assumption is that we are dealing with resemblances between different members of the *same* family. 'Family resemblance' concepts are a difficulty for a certain precisification of the general conception of philosophy I have outlined, but not for the general conception itself.

It may yet be objected that much is done in philosophy which cannot be construed as being an attempt simply to understand the essence or nature of something, in the sense I have characterized. This is no doubt true, but it does not undermine the general conception of philosophy as having such an understanding of nature and essence as an integral part of its business; and such an understanding of nature and essence is generally presupposed in other philosophical work. Or again, it may be objected that the philosophical understanding of nature and essence does not need to be

thought of as being a matter of understanding the unifying point or rationale behind the legitimate uses of words or concepts; it might be thought that such a view of understanding the nature of things went out of fashion with ordinary language philosophy. It is certainly true that there are other views of what it is to form a philosophical understanding of nature and essence, but this view has not really been discredited: attempts to abandon the conception of a priori truths have troubles of their own; and it is unclear how we can characterize the a priori except in terms of the unifying rationale behind the legitimate uses of words or concepts. Nor does this view of what it is to understand the nature and essence of things depend upon anything like ordinary language philosophy; in fact, it tends to undermine ordinary language philosophy to the extent that it recommends that we revise our everyday judgments about the legitimate use of words on the basis of a unifying conception of the rationale behind such uses.

IV

Nevertheless, this general conception of philosophy will not support any of (D1)–(D3) on its own: we will also need a certain conception of what metaphor is. How must we think of metaphor to make (D1) plausible, in the way in which Derrida intends it?

The first step is to say that the concept of metaphor depends on the distinction between 'proper' and 'non-proper' uses of a word or concept. And the 'proper' uses, I have suggested, are those which are united by the kind of unifying rationale which it is the business of philosophy to understand. This is not yet enough for (D1), however, if (D1) is to be understood as it has to be for one of the central purposes of Derrida's paper. For Derrida is concerned to show that using the concept of metaphor already commits one to the enterprise of philosophy: this is why any attempt to debunk philosophy from outside, on the grounds that it is a 'white mythology', must undermine itself. But this is not shown simply by showing that the concept of metaphor depends on the distinction between the 'proper' and the 'non-proper'. For the concept of metaphor might be parasitic upon that distinction, and then subvert it. And if this were the case, the concept of metaphor could be thought of as a kind of post-philosophical concept, whose use did not at all commit one to the values of philosophy: philosophy would only be of interest as the prey which the concept feeds on.

For (D1) to be established in the way which Derrida's argument requires, it must be the case that anyone who uses the concept of

metaphor is himself committed to the need for and legitimacy of a unifying rationale to the 'proper'—that is, at least the non-metaphorical—uses. What bearing does this have on the claim that something is metaphorically X? It seems to mean that making such a claim itself implies that the thing in question is not, or not thereby, really X. In this 'really' the fundamental validity of the 'proper' uses is endorsed.

What reason might there be for accepting (D2)? The assumption seems to be that the project of understanding the rationale for those uses of a concept for which there is a unifying rationale can only be understood if those uses are contrasted with metaphorical uses: unless that contrast is made, the class of uses which philosophy is concerned with will not be well defined. There would be no need of such a specific contrast if things which are metaphorically X (whatever being X may be) were simply things which are not really X: they would simply fall into the larger class of things which are not X. The specific contrast with metaphorical uses is only necessary if these uses are somehow legitimate and rationalizable after all: that is, if things which are metaphorically X are somehow X.

This seems to me plausible enough, given the plausibility of the conception of metaphor which it requires. (I shall return to that in the next section.) But it is not enough for (D2). What has been shown so far is just that *if* there is such a thing as being metaphorically X, which involves being both somehow X and somehow not X, *then* the uses which need to be unified by the kind of rationale which philosophy aims for will need to be contrasted with metaphorical uses. What (D2) requires, if we are to continue with this general conception of the nature of philosophy, is that the kind of use which philosophy is concerned with can only be made sense of if there is such a thing as being metaphorically X, which involves being both somehow X and somehow not X. This kind of apparently paradoxical use has to be possible if the non-paradoxical uses are to be possible.

This claim has a character which is similar to that of other Derridean claims: the apparently parasitic case needs to be possible for the apparently non-parasitic case to be intelligible; and the apparently non-parasitic case can only be understood in terms of its contrast with the apparently parasitic case.[17] This particular claim might be thought to be especially problematic, however, because the apparently parasitic case seems to be paradoxical. I shall offer a reason for accepting it, but this may not convince everyone.

[17] A famous example is Derrida's discussion of Austin, in 'Signature, Event, Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, pp. 309–30, at pp. 321–7.

Philosophy, according to the conception I have outlined, is concerned with certain straightforward contrasts: between true and false applications of the same word or concept; and between correct and incorrect uses. In the terms of these straightforward contrasts, there is a simple contradiction between saying that something is X and saying that it is not X, while using the word for or concept of X correctly. And there is a similarly straightforward contrast between using a word or concept correctly and misusing it (as someone might who simply did not understand what a word meant, for example). There is not even the hint of a contradiction in something's being said to be both X and not-X if one of the uses of the concept is simply a misuse.

We might wonder at this point about this conception of straightforwardness, which seems so appropriate here. How are we to understand it? A natural suggestion is: by contrast with what is not straightforward. Saying non-straightforwardly that something is X would be a kind of saying that it is X which did not provide a simple contradiction with saying straightforwardly that it is not X, but which was not itself a straightforward misuse of the concept X. But this kind of non-straightforward use of a concept is just a metaphorical use, according to the conception of metaphor which seems to be required if we accept that the uses for which philosophy is to concerned to find a rationale need to be contrasted with metaphorical uses. So it is natural to think that the kind of straightforwardness which seems to be involved in the contrasts which are presupposed in philosophical understanding can only itself be understood by contrast with the metaphorical.

Is it really essential to philosophy that it involves a kind of straightforwardness which is to be contrasted with the metaphorical? Here are two further reasons for thinking that it is. First, if this kind of straightforwardness, understood in terms of a contrast with the metaphorical, is essential to philosophy, it can be used as part of a characterization of philosophy as a discipline. In particular, it can be used to contrast a philosophical treatment of a text with a literary one. If we follow a commonplace conception of a philosophical approach to a text, we will suppose that the philosopher is concerned to ask whether what is said is true; and given that the possibility of truth depends on the existence of a rationale which unifies the uses of concepts, this will require some unification of the use of concepts in the text with other uses of those concepts. A literary approach to a text, by contrast, (according to a similarly commonplace conception of literature) is not concerned with the truth of what is said, and consequently can dwell on and exploit what is non-straightforward about the use of concepts,

what cannot be precisely unified with other uses of the same concepts.[18]

The second additional reason for thinking that philosophy essentially involves a kind of straightforwardness which contrasts with the metaphorical, on the conception of metaphor which has been outlined briefly here, is that this would explain why philosophers have been concerned with metaphor in particular among figures. A classical rhetoric will count metaphor as merely one among many figures of speech; but there is a vast philosophical literature about metaphor, and almost none about simile, or synecdoche, or hypallage, except insofar as these other figures are brought into a discussion of metaphor. A natural explanation of this is that metaphor is uniquely paradoxical, and uniquely disturbing to philosophy. This would make sense if (D2) were true.

This may not be enough to remove every doubt about (D2). But it does seem enough to mean that (D2) should be taken seriously.

V

(D1) and (D2) require something very simple, and at the same time rather bewildering, about the concept of metaphor: for something to be metaphorically X is for it to be X, without being really X.[19] I shall not offer here a positive account of how there could be such a thing as metaphor, if this description of metaphors is right. But the fact that the description is, on the face of it, paradoxical seems to me to count for rather than against it: this would explain the persistence of the problem of metaphor.

But although I shall not be offering any positive account of metaphor, it is important to emphasize that the general conception of metaphor which is required for (D1) and (D2) is already inconsistent with the two most distinctive types of philosophical theory of metaphor, as well as some familiar commonplaces about metaphor and meaning. I will argue briefly that this conflict with various

[18] Someone might object to the apparent naivety of this contrast between philosophical and literary issues, thinking that Derrida himself has put it in question. I think this is a misunderstanding of Derrida; his work seems to me to be best seen as, as it were, metaphorically philosophical (or literary), on the conception of metaphor which has been outlined here: it is both in a way philosophical and in a way not philosophical. But this claim itself presupposes a clear distinction between what is and what is not properly philosophical.

[19] This actually seems to be required by the relation between philosophy and metaphor which is assumed by Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

received views about metaphor is a point—arguably the same point—in favour of the conception required for (D1) and (D2).

First, we will need to reject the view that in metaphorical uses a secondary, metaphorical meaning is exploited.[20] For if to say that something is metaphorically X is to say that it is X in a different sense, then it is unclear why it implies that the thing is not really X, on the relevant understanding of 'really'. But it is clear anyway that we cannot give a satisfactory account of metaphor simply by saying that metaphors involve a secondary meaning of the relevant words: for there are secondary meanings which are not metaphorical. And it is quite unclear how we could repair this defect without explicitly insisting that in metaphors the secondary meanings are metaphorical meanings; but this would be circular in an account of metaphor, as well as being disruptive of the notion of meaning.

Secondly, we will have to reject the Davidsonian view that to describe as metaphorical someone's saying that a thing is X is just to think that the thing is so obviously X or not X that the saying must be meant as an invitation to think of it in some new way.[21] For consider the most common case, in which the thing in question is obviously not X. What Davidson's view fails to take account of is that the thing is nevertheless somehow X. This is what is needed, if we are to make sense of (D2). And we surely need it anyway, if we are to do justice to metaphors. For Davidson's view fails to acknowledge the fact that when we use a word metaphorically, the use is, in a way, subject to the rationale which unites the non-metaphorical uses of the same word. This is what leads to the most obviously implausible feature of Davidson's view, that the relation between a metaphor and someone who hears it or reads is merely one of cause and psychological effect:[22] there is no such thing, strictly speaking, as understanding a metaphor; all that can be understood is the speaker's motives in trying to produce that effect. (It is noticeable in this connection that Davidson's account cannot accommodate the

[20] This view is the target of D. Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 245–64.

[21] This is the positive view of 'What Metaphors Mean'. In fact, I see no reason to count any metaphors as depending on absurdly obvious literal truths: Donne's famous 'No man is an island', for example, does not strike me as being metaphorical itself; rather, it presupposes a metaphor, that man is one kind of land mass rather than another. And Davidson's example, 'Business is business' ('What Metaphors Mean', p. 258), seems to me obviously not metaphorical.

[22] Davidson's most extreme statement of this point is in his likening of the operation of metaphors to the effect of a bump on the head: 'What Metaphors Mean', p. 262.

idea of being metaphorically *X*: he can at best approximate that notion by talk of being metaphorically said to be *X*.)

We can see that these two familiar approaches go wrong in failing to do justice to the paradox in any sensitive description of metaphor. Each attempts to give an account of metaphor by suppressing one side of the paradox. The 'secondary-meaning' view makes some sense of the way in which something which is metaphorically *X* is somehow *X*, but it does not deal with the way in which it is not really *X*. The Davidsonian view, in the most common cases at least, makes some sense of the way in which something which is metaphorically *X* is not really *X*; but it does not account for the way in which it is *X*. This reinforces the point that if the conception of metaphor demanded by (D1) and (D2) preserves the paradox in the natural description of metaphor, that counts in favour of (D1) and (D2).

(D1) also has a consequence about the relation between metaphoricity and the knowledge of speakers and hearers. For if a use is metaphorical if it both in a way conforms, and in a way does not conform to the unifying rationale which philosophy leads one to understand, then just as one cannot take something to be metaphorical without being committed to some philosophy, so one cannot know that something is metaphorical without having got the philosophy right. If we assume that philosophy is not just a systematization of what ordinary speakers and hearers already think, this means that ordinary speakers and hearers may be wrong in supposing that something is metaphorical. And, conversely, there seems no clear reason to deny that something could be metaphorical without its being recognized as such by ordinary speakers and hearers. This conflicts with a common view which holds that forms of words which are no longer seen as metaphors are dead metaphors, and that dead metaphors are ex-metaphors.[23] For the assumption behind this common view seems to be that something cannot be a metaphor without being taken to be one by ordinary speakers and hearers.

It does not immediately follow from this, however, that whether a use is metaphorical is independent of a speaker's intentions. Intention is often appealed to in order to distinguish between metaphorical and non-metaphorical uses of the same words in the same sentences.[24] I doubt if such an appeal can be necessary, since we often judge that certain uses are metaphorical without any inde-

[23] For this view, see, e.g., M. Black, 'More about Metaphor', in A. Ortony, (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (2nd edn, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 19–41, at p. 25; Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', p. 252; N. Goodman, *Languages of Art* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p. 71.

[24] See, e.g., M. Bergmann, 'Metaphorical Assertions', *The Philosophical Review* 91 (1982), pp. 229–45, at p. 232.

pendent access to the intentions of the author. But a need to appeal to intention is not ruled out simply by saying that ordinary speakers and hearers may be wrong about what is metaphorical: this simply means that intention—even recognized intention—is not *enough* to decide what is metaphorical.

The links between metaphor and philosophy which are stated in (D1) and (D2) have some consequences for the kinds of things which can be metaphors. A metaphor will be a particular use of a word or concept to apply to a particular thing or kind of thing. It will be such a use of a word or concept which is, in the first instance, metaphorical. A sentence, or an utterance, or a poem may be metaphorical too: but only in virtue of containing a metaphorical use of a word or concept. This, again, seems to me at least not unnatural: it need only be resisted by someone adopting Davidson's theory, but that is implausible anyway. And it provides room for the possibility that the concept of metaphor might itself be metaphorical, which (D3b) requires. To claim that the concept of metaphor is metaphorical would be to claim that the use of the concept of metaphor to describe the things which we call metaphors (that is, metaphorical uses of concepts and words) is metaphorical. That would mean that (the things we call) metaphors are not really metaphors; so presumably something else—some kind of transport or transfer, perhaps[25]—would really be a metaphor.

VI

In order to do justice to (D1) and (D2), we have been led to preliminary general characterizations of the nature of philosophy, and of metaphor. Both of these general characterizations seem to be independently attractive. That means that we will have some difficulty keeping philosophy itself, and anyone who uses the concept of metaphor, clear of contradiction if (D3) is true.

So is (D3) true, on the understanding of the nature of philosophy and of metaphor which I have been elaborating? I think it depends upon how the general conception of philosophical understanding which I have outlined is elaborated. According to the general conception, the philosopher aims to understand the rationale which unifies the correct uses of a particular word or concept. This rationale will provide some understanding of why each particular correct application is correct. The fundamental issue is over whether this

[25] Goodman makes crucial use of the metaphors of transport and transfer in his discussion of metaphor: see especially, *Languages of Art*, pp. 74–80.

rationale is supposed to be part of a *ground* for true application—that is, application which produces true judgments or statements—in a certain familiar sense of 'ground'. Here is an attempt at a definition:

> Something is the *ground* for the true application of a word or concept if and only if, for each particular occasion,
>
> (G1) It is sufficient, in conjunction with the meaning of the other words in the sentence in which the word occurs, or the other concepts involved in the judgment, and the actual situation in the world, to determine whether or not the word or concept is truly applied; and
> (G2) It can be recognized as determining whether or not the word or concept is truly applied independently of actually deciding whether to apply the word or concept on that occasion—at least in cases where it is possible to know whether the word or concept is truly applied.

(Note that (G2) is concerned with whether something can be *recognized* as determining truth independently of deciding to apply a word or concept: it does not make truth itself a matter of decision.)

To see what hangs on this, consider a judgment that something is a stone. We can imagine a rationalization of that judgment being represented by a simple argument:

(S1) Anything which is *like that* is a stone;
(S2) This is *like that*; so
(S3) This is a stone.

The phrase '*like that*' here is meant to express my rationalizing conception of what it is to be a stone. The question whether it could form part of a *ground* for correct application of the concept of a stone turns on the relative status of the premises and the conclusion in a simple argument of this form.

We can imagine the relationship between premises and conclusion taking one of two forms in practice. It may be that I actually *derive* (S3) from (S1) and (S2): in this case my judgment of (S3) is clearly dependent upon (S1) and (S2); and my judgment of (S1) and (S2) will be independent of my judgment of (S3). Alternatively, we may suppose that I am simply trained to use a particular word or concept in particular situations; if the judgment of (S3) is the product of such basic training, it will be independent of (S1) and (S2); (S1) and (S2) will provide a rationalization after the fact for the judgment. In this kind of case, we can imagine some negotiation taking place between my judgment about a particular situation

(such as (S3)) and my rationalizing conception: sometimes my judgment about the particular situation may lead me to revise my conception of what it is for something to be a stone (say); and sometimes my general conception of what it is to be a stone may lead my to revise my judgment about a particular situation.

Now a general rationalizing conception will form part of the *ground* for the use of a particular word or concept (in the sense specified by the definition I have offered) if it *always* trumps any independently formed judgment about a particular case. It needs to have a kind of authority which is in principle not open to question in the light of judgments about particular cases. Otherwise it will not be possible to avoid considering the application of the word or concept in the particular case, as (G2) requires.

We can now imagine two different ways of elaborating the general view of philosophy which I outlined earlier. According to one elaboration, the task of philosophy is to equip one with a ground for the true application of concepts, in just the sense which I have defined. We are looking for something which can be settled once and for all, from which the truth of true applications simply follows, given an appropriate knowledge of the state of the world. On this conception, philosophical understanding is in principle theoretical: there is some theory knowledge of which would constitute what it is tempting to think of as a grasp of the concepts being considered. According to the other elaboration, philosophical understanding is irreducibly practical in the sense that it is fundamentally an ability to make the right judgments in particular circumstances; no theoretical knowledge could have decisive authority over particular judgments. On this conception, understanding the unifying rationale for the use of a particular word or concept is a matter of being able to make judgments about each use in the light of its relation to others; but it is not knowledge of a ground for the true application of concepts. Let us call these two elaborations the theoretical and non-theoretical conceptions of philosophy, respectively.

VII

Derrida's arguments for (D3) seem to me to have some chance of working against the theoretical conception of philosophy, but not against the non-theoretical conception. There were two arguments for (D3). The first took philosophy to be committed to the ideal of domination, and then claimed that philosophy could not dominate metaphor, precisely because metaphor was a philosophical concept in the sense required for (D2). Now why does the fact that philosophy

presupposes the legitimacy of the concept of metaphor mean that philosophy cannot dominate metaphor? The problem seems to be that domination is taken to be something which is practised from some standpoint which is independent of what it dominates. So to say that philosophy is committed to the ideal of domination is to say that philosophy is concerned in general to adopt a perspective which will be independent of that which it is concerned with.

The theoretical conception of philosophy does seem to be committed to this ideal, and therefore to face the difficulty posed by (D3) on the basis of this first argument. For each case of the application of a concept, the theoretical conception seeks a vantage point which is independent of that application from which the application can be decisively justified. Now consider the concept of what is possible, and in particular the judgment:

(M) Metaphors (on the conception required for (D1) and (D2)) are possible.

To meet its own demands, the theoretical conception would have to hold that it is possible to form a general conception of what is possible, which can itself be appreciated independently of deciding on the truth or falsity of (M), and from which the truth or falsity of (M) follows. But the kind of possibility at issue in (M) is metaphysical or philosophical possibility. It follows that if (D2) is right, the truth of (M) must already have been decided in forming a legitimate conception of what is, in that sense, possible.

This looks like a way of spelling out Derrida's first argument for (D3), but it appears only to affect the theoretical conception of philosophy. If we can really make sense of a non-theoretical way of doing philosophy, it will be immune to this objection.

The other argument for (D3) depended on two further claims:

(D3a) Philosophy is committed to thinking that every genuine concept or distinction can be expressed non-metaphorically;
(D3b) The concept of metaphor, and the distinctions on which it depends, cannot be expressed non-metaphorically.

I shall not consider whether (D3b) is true. The crucial point is that (D3a) only seems to hold for the theoretical conception of philosophy. (D3a) seems to hold for the theoretical conception of philosophy because no particular device or mode of expression can be essential to any distinction or concept, according to that conception.

Here is the reason for that. The theoretical conception of philosophy is committed to the possibility of providing a theoretical model of a certain kind of practical ability. The practical abilities it is concerned with are the abilities to use particular concepts and the

abilities to speak particular languages. To provide a theoretical model of such abilities is to provide something which is independent of the ability to use those very concepts, or those very words, which could ground such use. But this will provide one with a way of appreciating the distinctions on which the use of these words and concepts rests which is independent of them. It ought then to be possible simply to introduce by definition some new mode of expression of the very same distinctions. It will be hard to see why metaphors are not always dispensable (except for decorative or emotive purposes) on such a view.

The non-theoretical conception of philosophy is committed to no such thesis of the dispensability of particular modes of expression. (Indeed, the whole idea of the 'expression' of something which is presumably itself independent of the expression ought to be questionable on the non-theoretical view.) Consequently, it is not vulnerable in this way to Derrida's argument. There is a sense in which even the non-theoretical conception cannot 'accommodate' metaphorical uses, but this need not lead to any kind of internal contradiction within philosophy.

To see this, consider a particular type of metaphorical use of a word or concept: say, the use of the word 'dragon' to characterize a particularly fierce kind of woman. There is no reason in principle why someone should not seek a philosophical understanding of the rationale which unifies the 'proper' uses of this metaphor. One will be concerned to understand how someone has to be to be a dragon (why, for example, the metaphor is supposed to apply most naturally to women). The 'proper' uses of the metaphor, which are supposed to be unified by the rationale which the philosopher aims to understand, must be contrasted, of course, with certain supposed 'non-proper' uses. But these can be made sense of: we might think of a (higher-order) metaphorical use of the dragon metaphor to apply to a plant among other plants, say, or to a particular kind of philosophical style.

VIII

It seems to me, in conclusion, that a decent case can be made for (D1) and (D2), but that the problem they create is for a particular conception of philosophy, rather than philosophy itself. Indeed, if we are convinced by (D1) and (D2), we will take them to form the basis of an argument for rejecting the theoretical conception of philosophy.

But I suspect that such a rejection would require a more general

upheaval of our philosophical preconceptions than it might, at first sight, seem to do. And if that is right, it is understandable that someone might (as Derrida seems to do) identify philosophy itself with the theoretical conception of philosophy. Here are four indications of the difficulty of rejecting the theoretical conception of philosophy.

First, if we reject the theoretical conception, we ought to be wary about the idea of something which *makes* a particular judgment true, or of something which *makes* one thing rather than another a correct application of a rule. For it seems that the point of using the word 'makes' here is to suggest that a certain judgment about the particular case is somehow *forced* on us by something which is recognizable independently of considering that judgment. Attempts to say what it is to follow a rule, for example, whether they are psychologistic, anthropologistic, or Platonist all seem to have this character.[26] But this means that they are all committed to the conception of *ground* which underlies the theoretical conception of philosophy.

Secondly, we generally operate with a conception of justification which depends upon something like the notion of *ground* which I have characterized. We generally demand that justifications be objective, in at least the minimal sense that the legitimacy or truth of what is cited as a justification must be recognizable independently of deciding on the legitimacy or truth of what it is meant to justify. This is an absolutely commonplace demand, even if it is generally not made explicit: it seems to underlie the classical problem of induction, for example. But if we question the general legitimacy of the notion of ground which I have characterized, then we have no right to insist, in general, that justifications must be objective in this sense. And we will then have to make sense of a kind of practical justification which does not make the same demands.

Thirdly, it seems that it is only commitment to the existence of some ground of correctness wherever there is correctness which leads us to think that languages are systems of signs, where a sign is something intrinsically meaningless which is somehow assigned a meaning, or else a kind of compound of an intrinsically meaningless thing and an assigned meaning. The core of the idea that languages are systems of signs in this sense is that the fundamental issue of correctness in the use of a word does not depend upon its being that very word which is used. The assumption here is that the basic work is done by a rule for use, which could equally well have been a rule for using a different word. But such a rule for use,

[26] I have in mind here the debates about Wittgenstein prompted by S. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

whether stated in terms of the concepts expressed by words or the properties referred to by them, must then constitute a ground for correctness, in the sense defined by (G1) and (G2). It looks as if this conception of language depends upon thinking there must be some ground of correctness wherever there is correctness. If that is right, then the consequences of abandoning that commitment will be significant; for almost everything that has ever been written in the philosophy of language has assumed that languages are systems of signs.

Finally, some of the most basic concepts of philosophy at least trace their history through the theoretical conception of philosophy. Here are two examples. The concept of *theory* derives from the idea that philosophical understanding is a kind of *vision*: it is natural to understand this vision as providing one with access to something which would then simply yield correct judgments about particular cases. And the concept of *concept* (like the German 'Begriff') derives from the idea of something which is *grasped*: again, the idea seems to be of something which, once got hold of, is immune to further revision and will settle all disputes. It is natural to see these concepts, as Derrida does, as belonging to a whole network of metaphors which embody the theoretical conception of philosophy, and constantly tempt one towards it.[27]

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[27] See e.g., 'White Mythology', pp. 224 and 228–9.